



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
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CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Attorney General McGraw Recovers \$7.9 Million for West Virginians from NJ Lawyer Hecker and APM Collection Agencies

CHARLESTON – West Virginia Attorney General Darrell McGraw today announced a settlement with Laurence A. Hecker, a New Jersey lawyer, and several out-of-state debt collection agencies that Hecker represents known as the APM Companies resulting in more than \$7.9 million dollars in cancelled debts for West Virginians.

McGraw's Consumer Protection Division entered into an agreement with Hecker and his two affiliated Pennsylvania collection agencies, APM Financial Solutions, LLC, and Account Portfolio Management, LLC. The settlement requires the cancellation of \$7.9 million dollars in charged-off credit card debt that Hecker and the APM Companies attempted to collect from 1,922 West Virginia consumers. The companies also paid \$45,000 toward customer refunds and consumer education and agreed to delete the debts from credit records.

McGraw's office began investigating Hecker and the APM Companies in 2006 after receiving complaints from West Virginia consumers who reported they were threatened with lawsuits and excessively pressured to pay alleged debts. To further embellish the lawsuit threat, Hecker sent letters to consumers on his law office stationery to demand payment of the debts. The Attorney General's investigation revealed that the majority of the collection attempts were for "time-barred" debts, i.e., debts so old that the statute of limitations to sue had expired and lawsuits were therefore barred by law.

The Attorney General's Office also discovered that Hecker and the APM Companies – which were attempting to collect debts in West Virginia without being licensed or bonded as required by state law – were demanding payments without any proof that they owned the debts or of the amounts owed other than a computer spreadsheet.

"The credit card industry and predatory lenders have sometimes saddled West Virginia consumers with exorbitant debts," Attorney General McGraw stated. "This unfortunate situation has now evolved into a multibillion-dollar debt-buying industry in which unlawful tactics are used to coerce consumers to pay debts they may not owe with funds they do not have.

"I will not allow consumers facing dire financial circumstances to be crushed by abusive collection practices. My office will continue our vigorous efforts to enforce the law against unscrupulous collection agencies and debt buyers."

To file a complaint concerning debt collection, West Virginia consumers can contact the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Hotline at 1-800-368-8808. Complaint forms are also available at www.wvago.gov. For regular consumer news updates, follow the AGO on Facebook and Twitter.

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